

OSBA: Working for you

When seconds count, count on Leader Alert

by Amanda Levy
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School violence has become all too common over the past decade. School shootings, fights, bomb threats and criminal activity near schools has led to lockdowns, evacuations, cancellations and other emergency measures.

Add to that severe weather, utility outages and hazardous material incidents caused by train derailments or industrial mishaps, and you see why it is more important than ever to have a speedy, effective procedure in place to communicate with students, parents, staff and the community at large.

Leader Alert, the newest OSBA endorsed program, offers an automated emergency notification system for school districts. Whether by phone, text message, or e-mail, Leader Alert quickly sends out an automated message to those who need to know.

Leader Alert is a two-way, rapid-deployment system that provides timely notification and follow-up on school closings, delays, dangerous or threatening situations, and special events and announcements. In short - if you need to get your message out now, you need Leader Alert.

In addition, this communication service is designed to fill a critical gap in the Dept. of Homeland Security's plan for responding to terrorist threats by notifying key personnel in federal, state and local agencies the moment a threat is detected.

Leader Alert is a simple system that school districts can easily launch into action in a matter of seconds. The service enables districts to prerecord or create alerts as needed; select the appropriate group of people to notify; and click a "Send Alert Now" key to reach your intended audience within seconds.

Leader Alert's key design features include:



Leader[®]

- two-way communications;
- the capacity to send messages via voice, e-mail, pager, fax and text message;
- the ability to send prerecorded or real-time voice and text alerts;
- tracking of recipient confirmations;
- a Web-based control console for the district;
- a highly secure system;
- the capability of sending from one to millions of messages.

When crafting messages to send to parents, staff, students and the community, **Michael McKibben**, chairman and founder of Leader Technologies, the provider of Leader Alert, recommends the following:

- Keep your messages short and to the point. If you ramble, or contain too much detail, your recipients may hang up and miss vital information, or worse yet, will ignore future messages.
- Parents want to *know*, rather than guess when their children's safety is involved, and very much appreciate timely alerts from school administrators. Proactive alerts show care and concern, as well as decisiveness on the part of school leaders.
- Make the alerting approval process fast and effective. Too many rules and hesitant decision-making will stall the process, and important messages will be delayed or not sent at all. Manage this process by using decisive, action-oriented people for whom words come easily.
- Using the alert system effectively, like any new skill, has a learning curve. Ask constituents to be patient with the administrators who are in charge of the alerts.
- There is no perfect alert. Temper the instinct to overly rehearse alerts when in

crisis mode so as not to stumble over words. Likewise, some administrators may be so fearful of making a mistake that they fail to alert when they should.

- Involve parents: an opt-in Web portal allows parents to

identify and update their preferred contact information securely. This can include child care providers, caregivers, neighbors and family.

- Inaccuracies in alerts can be corrected by a subsequent alert. However, when people don't have any information at all, their ability to contribute to solutions is diminished. They may be more apt to do the wrong things. Likewise, parents who are informed will not pull their children from school and force unnecessary cancellation of classes. They also may be able to offer help.

For parents whose children could be in harm's way, alerting is a lifeline. Without accurate information, parents have few choices about how to react. They can get in their cars, drive to school and pull their children out. They can call the school, only to hear the busy signal of an overwhelmed phone system. They can watch TV, hoping for some news. But timely, informative and accurate messages from Leader Alert will keep them up-to-date on any situation and give them the information they need.

Attendees at OSBA's annual Board Leadership Institute last month got to see firsthand how the service works by offering their cell phone numbers for a demonstration during the closing luncheon. Others wishing to give the alert system a try can visit Leader Alert's Web site at www.leader.com/osba and sign up for a free test account.

To learn more or to schedule a demonstration, please contact **John Needham** of Leader Technologies at (614) 890-1986 or jneedham@leader.com or OSBA's **Amanda Levy** at (614) 540-4000; (800) 589-OSBA; or a_levy@osba-ohio.org.